

Sputnik Reevaluated:
Pedagogic Debate in Connecticut Secondary Schools, 1956-1964

Honors Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction

In October of 1957, the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik I* and the Space Race that would, in large part, function as the scorekeeper of the Cold War. The first artificial satellite to be launched into earth's orbit ignited apprehension, doubt, and anger throughout an American society conditioned to fear and distrust the Soviets as a result of propaganda efforts within the United States. One of the most significant areas targeted for reappraisal and reform in the aftermath of the *Sputnik* launch was the American public school. The satellite launch signaled to many Americans that their public schools had failed in producing the technical minds required to win the Cold War.

The *Sputnik* launch was the discrete impetus for reform efforts directed at the American high school. In the August 1st, 1958 of *Congressional Digest*, it was reported that the “intensity and reappraisal” of US schools was undertaken because of the *Sputnik* launch the previous November.¹ As John L. Rudolph argues in his book *Scientists in the Classroom: The Cold War Reconstruction of American Science Education*, the American citizenry were frightened, demoralized, and eventually stirred to action by the launch of *Sputnik*.² In Connecticut, the *Hartford Courant* published an editorial warning of a dangerous overreaction to the launch in Washington and the public sphere in general.³ The United States Commissioner of Education, Lawrence G. Derthick, vividly described (less than a month after the launch) the tangible anxiety brought about by the Russian satellite: “The eerie ‘beep-beep’ of sputnik on its man-made orbit through space dramatizes anew that a galvanic program of education is needed to keep abreast of

¹ United States. Congressional Digest. *The Challenge to Today's Public Schools*. 1 August 1958. Web. 21 May 2010.

² John L. Rudolph, *Scientists in the Classroom: The Cold War Reconstruction of American Science Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 84.

³ *Hartford Courant* editorial, “Pendulum of Education is Swinging Fast,” *Connecticut Teacher* 25, no. 2 (1957): 4.

the needs of our increasingly dynamic and complex society.”⁴ Clearly, *Sputnik* provoked a strong reaction in the American psyche, which for years had been cultivated to fear and distrust the Soviet Union.

In the immediate aftermath of the *Sputnik* launch, an effort was undertaken to re-examine and, for some, re-imagine, the American secondary school. Debates on the direction of public education in America were undertaken as American citizens sought to leverage science in the secondary school to win Cold War battles in the political, technological, and military arenas. With *Sputnik* as the discrete impetus, two sets of conflicts materialized amongst both professional educators and policy makers. The first battle was curricular. One group desired to maintain the traditional American liberal arts curriculum and instructional method, with a strong emphasis on the humanities. The other advocated a move toward a hard science curriculum focused on measurable results in technology directly and immediately applicable to the Cold War struggle. The second dispute hinged on whether decisions which affected American education would be made at the Federal or State level. Both battles were strongly influenced by American Cold War culture. A pro-American dialect became requisite to enter the discussion in Cold War politics on the federal, state, and local levels. This patriotic vernacular influenced the nature of the debate over the future of American public education.

Because of the diffusion of authority inherent in the American public education system, significant differences between state and local responses to *Sputnik* around the nation were inevitable. Given the unique economic and educational realities in Connecticut in the post-*Sputnik* period, the pedagogic debate in the state provides for a rich analysis of the struggle in American public education after the *Sputnik* launch. The presence of structurally distinctive

⁴ Austin C. Wehrwein, “Educators Urge High School Shift: See Bright Students Hurt by Anti-Intellectualism,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1957.

schools, such as the Norwich Free Academy, also contributes to the importance of the response of the educational community in Connecticut to the understanding of Cold War-era education as a whole. In the state of Connecticut, educational leaders endeavored to retain strong comprehensive education in the secondary school and expressed misgivings over a potential shift to what was perceived to be a “Soviet” style of education which focused solely on hard academic subjects. Professional educators, local leaders, and state administrators in Connecticut quickly integrated science and mathematics curricula, technology, and vocational education into the state’s classroom as a result of the crisis in education brought on by *Sputnik*. However, these reform efforts were expressly made at the state and local level only, with reformers resisting any mandate from Washington. Additionally, politicians at virtually every level of government extolled the virtues of local control in direct opposition to Soviet state planning. Irrespective of the stance taken by politicians, educators, and local constituents in Connecticut following the *Sputnik* launch, the decisions advocated invariably relied upon a nationalistic Cold War vernacular.

Pedagogic Thought Prior to *Sputnik*

In the period prior to *Sputnik*, the progressive pedagogic philosophy of John Dewey had been the dominant theory in the education of the nation’s teachers. Many of Dewey’s ideas were grouped and termed “Life Adjustment Education” during the 20th Century. Generally speaking, Life Adjustment Education focused on the well-being of the student both inside and outside the classroom. Social development was emphasized in concurrence with academic advancement. A student’s natural interest in a particular subject was considered to be the most important indicator of his or her success in that subject. Put simply, education began and ended with student well-

being in all aspects of life. The tradition began by Dewey faced substantial challenges for the first time in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Mortimer Smith criticized a comprehensive strategy of education in his 1949 book, *And Madly Teach*: “As our high schools spend less and less time on serious education and more and more on matters that can best be learned outside of school, there is an inevitable drop in standards all along the line.”⁵ Smith presented the family unit, church, and the workplace as alternative sources for the education of children. In addition to the objections raised by Smith, Arthur Bestor described the Life Adjustment movement as a “parody of education” in his 1953 work, *Educational Wastelands*.⁶ Bestor believed that educational policy needed to be placed back in the hands of subject matter experts in traditional academic subjects who focused on what to teach, as opposed to pedagogic specialists who focused on how to teach.

Although there were some notable challenges to Dewey’s philosophy prior to the *Sputnik* launch, the Soviet satellite was the principal cause for the criticism of Dewey and Life Adjustment Education. “Hard pedagogy”, i.e. a method of instruction focused on academic discipline and specialized analysis, was advanced as a replacement for the ideals held by Dewey. In the late 1950s, it was widely believed that a focus on certain academic subjects, particularly mathematics and the sciences, would benefit the national defense vis-à-vis technological advancement. Many decision-makers around the country attributed the perceived failure of the public schools to the fact that the schools had taken their collective eye off the ball of academic rigor. Instead, it was widely believed, life adjustment curriculum efforts had encouraged education in non-academic subjects at the expense of traditional academic topics. The *Sputnik* launch brought the challenges to traditional progressive education to the fore. Many parents,

⁵ Mortimer Smith, *And Madly Teach* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), 31.

⁶ Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in our Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 81.

politicians, and the public at large advocated a hard pedagogic strategy. However, teachers had a more diverse set of opinions on the future of education in Connecticut secondary school than the public and politicians did.

Reaction to *Sputnik* in the Education Community

The debate over the future of education in the secondary school amongst professional educators was also initiated by *Sputnik*, but the nature of the debate in the education community was rather different than the one in the public arena. Joseph O'Donnell, a teacher in Windsor, Connecticut, acknowledged in January of 1960 that "with the launching of space satellites, we are undergoing a period of reappraisal of the secondary schools in the science and math areas."⁷ In Connecticut, the *Hartford Courant* reported that "one of the direct results of the sputniks has been that U.S. people have been taking a long look at their educational system and the program this country has for producing scientists and engineers."⁸ For many Americans parents and politicians, the *Sputnik* launch was representative of the massive failure of their public schools, and a reappraisal and subsequent reform of American pedagogy was necessary.

In *Sputnik*'s wake, reasserting their own societal value became a top priority for many professional educators who found themselves under siege. Furthermore, attempts were made to convince those outside the educational community that the scourge of socialism required an increased commitment to teacher education, compensation, and respect. Dr. Arthur F. Corey, Executive Secretary of the California State Teachers Association, was one such campaigner for increased teacher recognition. Corey consoled his fellow educators whom he acknowledges may be feeling frightened or challenged in the environment of increased scrutiny following *Sputnik*.

⁷ Joseph H. O'Donnell, "Between the Public and our Profession," *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 4 (1960): 4.

⁸ Keith Schonrock, "Russian Gains Make Americans Take Long Look at Education," *Hartford Courant*, December 15, 1957.

He also noted that “come what may, disaster or millennium, teachers will still be our salvation.”⁹ Instead of placing blame for the perceived failure of the American public school on the teacher, Corey blamed those outside the teaching community: “Basic to all our education problems is the fact that teachers in American life are not accorded the confidence, the faith, and trust which the importance of their work deserves.”¹⁰ In going on to compare teachers to doctors and lawyers, Corey argued that teaching should be considered a profession filled with intellectuals holding unique skills and specialized knowledge.

Joseph H. O’Donnell, a public school teacher from Windsor, CT, was more precise in articulating the type of respect he believed teachers were due. O’Donnell reported that, in Connecticut, “salary increases are still given grudgingly by the public” and that “the public and taxpayers in many cases are misinformed as to what is actually going on in the schools.”¹¹ It is clear that, in the midst of the pedagogic crisis of the late 1950s, many teachers attempted to leverage the increasing importance of education to the national defense in the hopes of garnering increased prestige and pay. As O’Donnell argued, “When we improve our public relations with an informed tax-paying public, the salaries and the community prestige that we deserve will ultimately follow.”¹² The *Sputnik* launch clearly had a tangible impact on educator’s opinions not only regarding the pedagogic future of the nation’s schools, but also to do with the place of the teaching profession in American society.

In addition to Corey and O’Donnell, Joseph F. Delano, a high school teacher from West Haven, Connecticut, expressed his opinions about the importance of how teachers were perceived in the public sphere. Delano presented reasons for the low professional status of

⁹ Arthur F. Corey, “Teaching – A Profession or a Job?” *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 3 (1959): 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Joseph O’Donnell, “Between the Public and our Profession,” 4.

¹² Ibid., 5.

teachers in many local communities and put forth solutions to what he termed the “public relations” problem for the teaching community. In his article in *Connecticut Teacher*, a trade publication for professional educators in Connecticut, Delano listed six guiding thoughts for sound personal public relations with parents and local officials. The pervasiveness of *Sputnik* in the pedagogic and popular culture was evident as the fourth principle used the term in slang: “Thou Shalt Not Pre-Ignite Thy Sputniks. The overall story of education is not told in spectacular stories, or frightening headlines. It is one which must be told- simply, continuously, challengingly and with enthusiasm and truth.”¹³ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, *Sputnik* forced professional educators to re-think, defend, and assert their positions in society. For many teachers in Connecticut, their stature on a local level was equally important, if not more so, than the intellectual outcomes of the pedagogic debate or the scope of federal control over local school districts.

Comparison with the Soviet Secondary School

It has been demonstrated that *Sputnik* radically altered the way the American public felt about education and elicited a variety of reactions from the education community itself. In the midst of the reassessment of the American pedagogical system in the late 1950s, American educators and scholars became increasingly interested in the Russian education system. Immediately following the *Sputnik* launch in October of 1957, Americans were quick either to dismiss, envy, or criticize the structure of the Soviet school. The interest in the Soviet model of education expressed by reformers throughout the post-*Sputnik* period colored the debate over the future of American education. Experts on a national level warned against “aping” the Soviet

¹³ Joseph F. Delano, “The Teacher and Public Relations,” *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 7 (1960): 7.

education system.¹⁴ Because of the American interest in the Soviet system, when potential changes to the American system were discussed, the reformer could argue that his or her idea was one the Russians would definitely never adopt. That the Soviets would never pursue a particular reform effort was of great importance to the constituents of the public education system. Reformers often needed to qualify that their reform recommendation in the United States was antithetical to the Soviet strategy in order to succeed in their respective reform efforts.

One of the first responses in Connecticut to the apparent success in Soviet education was to deny any measure of Russian success. George L. Newsome, an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Bridgeport, acknowledged that it might be tempting to embrace the Russian system of education. However, Newsome was quick to argue that “we do not know definitively that there is a direct connection between Sputnik and Russian Education.”¹⁵ Newsome, to a large extent, was correct in that opinion. Many of the top Russian rocket scientists of the era had been educated abroad. Additionally, Newsome pointed out that Soviet political decision-makers allowed for multiple consecutive years of research on a single topic, whereas the American funding system was subject to varying trends in a budget or national priority.¹⁶ Although the points Newsome raised were valid, the American public, as we have seen, interpreted the *Sputnik* launch as a dominating victory for the Russian education system. Newsome, in cautioning “we do not know yet what price Russia had to pay for its all-out effort in launching Sputnik”,¹⁷ warned an American public already resolved to reform education with the hopes of exceeding Russian technological accomplishments. Traditional American pedagogic

¹⁴ Associated Press, “Aping Russian Education System Mistake, Experts Say,” *Hartford Courant*, Dec. 29, 1957.

¹⁵ George L. Newsome, “Spooks, Sputniks, and American Education,” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1958): 73.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

thought was under siege, and Newsome's argument was largely unwelcome in the reform-minded culture of the late 1950s.

Other Connecticut professional educators acknowledged shortcomings in the American public school while simultaneously attempting to discredit the Russian public education system. John Norman, Associate Professor of History and Government at Fairfield University, acknowledged the "real, if somewhat exaggerated achievements of Soviet education, which the sputniks have forced us to consider seriously."¹⁸ However, Norman presented the Soviet pedagogic system in stark contrast to traditional American democratic and individualistic values: "In our efforts to catch up and overtake Russia, we must guard against becoming like the Communists, who believe that education must be directed toward advancing the interests and security of the state regardless of other considerations."¹⁹ Norman presented a list of twenty-eight defects of Soviet education. The flaws ranged from "teachers often worry about party punishment in the form of expulsion or demotion"²⁰ to "athletic training does not seem to include the principles of good sportsmanship."²¹ By presenting the shortcomings of Russian education as also antithetical to American values, it was easy for education reformers in Connecticut to present their ideas as contradictory to the Soviet model. These differences were often prominent reasons for reform and were required in the Cold War environment to enter the reform discussion.

Still other professional educators and public officials attempted to influence the pedagogic debate of the period by revealing what the Russians themselves thought of the Soviet pedagogy and public school system. Richard Renfield, a project secretary of the Educational

¹⁸ John Norman, "Defects of Soviet Education," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1958): 69.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Policies Commission of the National Education Association (NEA) was one such public official. For many Americans, Russian dissatisfaction with the state-planned school system demonstrated not only a failure for the Soviets in education, but also a fundamental defect in the Russian system of government. Renfield's articles were frequently published in *Connecticut Teacher*, the widely-distributed official publication of the Connecticut Education Association. After a late 1959 visit to the Soviet Union, Renfield reported that there was great dissatisfaction among Russians themselves with their own pedagogic system. Furthermore, Renfield noted that "the complaints they [Russians] have are precisely the same things for which some Americans have been praising Soviet education."²² Renfield explained that many Russian students were unable to complete independent research on their own and that many Russian teachers were focused too much on what to teach and not enough on how to teach.²³ For many who resisted a transition to a purely academic Soviet model of education, the displeasure expressed by Russians and the lack of control they had over the system was a strong indictment of both the Soviet pedagogic and government schemes.

The Soviet Ten-Year School model, initially touted as a superior alternative to the United States public education system, was also a target of Renfield's criticism. The pedagogic debate of the period was nicely summarized by Renfield in *Teacher Education Quarterly*:

The experience of the Ten-Year School has demonstrated that good teaching is far more than the presentation of subject matter, that memorization and hard work are not to be equated with learning, and that the teacher of subjects is inevitably the teacher of

²² Richard Renfield, "An American Looks at Soviet Education," *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 5 (1960): 6.

²³ Ibid.

children. The basic goal of the teacher's methods is not to communicate facts, but to motivate pupils to learn.²⁴

Renfield clearly defended the pedagogic tradition established by Dewey and the Life Adjustment movement. For Renfield, the child was the center of the educational journey, not the subject matter itself. Renfield further disparaged the Soviet system and dispelled the notion that Soviet pedagogy resulted directly in the *Sputnik* launch by stating "the Soviets are attempting to alter radically the system which they believe had very little to do with producing their top scientists."²⁵ In the aftermath of the Soviet satellite launch, American citizens themselves became concerned with comparing their local education system to that of the Soviet Union. In the pages of the October, 1961 issue of *Connecticut Teacher*, Compton's Encyclopedia Company took out a full page advertisement to advertise the new fifty-one page article on Russia in its encyclopedia set to Connecticut educators and parents. The article was purported to "help you [the teacher] teach the facts about Russia's progress and at the same time instill devotion to the American belief in the importance of the individual."²⁶ A large table was presented in the advertisement comparing the social, political, and economic differences between the United States and the Soviet Union. Under education, the Soviet system was summarized as "State directs education for its needs" while the American system was characterized as "free choice of schools and studies."²⁷

Clearly, Connecticut teachers and the public in the state were focused on comparing the United States and Soviet pedagogic systems in the wake of *Sputnik*. Many of the assessments of the Russian pedagogic system discredited Soviet pedagogy, implicitly disparaged the politics of

²⁴ Richard Renfield, "Soviet Criticisms of Soviet Education," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1960-61): 62.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Russia is Revealed in Compton's," *CT Teacher* 29, no. 1 (1961): 29.

²⁷ Ibid.

the Kremlin, and made use of the pro-American Cold War vernacular which became commonplace in American debates over the future of its education system. As professional educators in Connecticut focused in part on the Russian secondary school, legislators on the federal level were concerned with the national security implications of *Sputnik* and, correspondingly, a Soviet secondary school which could be superior to its American rival.

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA)

On a national level, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was the principal outcome from the *Sputnik*-induced crisis in American education. Although local educators in both Connecticut and the rest of the nation had little say in the provisions of the Act, they would be compelled to adjust their respective pedagogic strategies as a result of the NDEA. The passage of the Act was a response to *Sputnik* and the resultant reaction from the general public and politicians in the context of Cold War fears of Russian superiority. The speed with which the act was drafted and passed (less than a year after the *Sputnik* launch) precluded local educators from influencing the substance of the Act. Individual teachers were largely relegated to reacting to the legislation as opposed to influencing it.

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was signed into law on September 2nd, 1958. In the introductory passage of the Act, Congress provided the rationale for the bill: “The defense of this nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles.”²⁸ While maintaining that the states and local communities should retain control over most matters of public education, the federal government simultaneously declared the necessity of direction in public education on a nationwide scale. The provision of the NDEA which is most clearly linked to American anxiety regarding public education in the wake of the *Sputnik* launch is Title III. Title III of the NDEA (Financial Assistance for Strengthening

²⁸ United States, *National Defense Education Act, 1958* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1958), 24.

Science, Mathematics, and Modern Foreign Language Instruction) provided for funds intended to “provide grants to State educational agencies...so that they can acquire laboratory and other special equipment.”²⁹ Under Title III of the NDEA, each state was required to submit a plan to the United States Commissioner of Education in order to receive funds.

Title VIII of the Act also was promulgated, in large part, due to the crisis in education after *Sputnik*. Title VIII allowed for funds and assistance to the states to aid in the development and improvement of local vocational programs. The individuals participating in these programs were to be trained “for useful employment as technicians or skilled workers in areas needed for national defense.”³⁰ As a result of its strong manufacturing base and technically skilled workforce, the state of Connecticut was well-positioned to make use of the funds available for the creation and enhancement of vocational education programs at the high school level. Interestingly, Connecticut’s system of vocational-technical schools were so well developed that comprehensive high schools in the state required relatively less funding under Title VIII of the NDEA than other states. Most states spent four dollars on vocation education for every federal dollar. In Connecticut, taxpayers spent six dollars for every federal one.³¹ That being said, the vocational education reform put into place due to *Sputnik* undoubtedly increased the success of the vocational-technical program in Connecticut. In 1955, 863 students graduated from such programs. That figure swelled to 1,797 students by 1965.³²

On a national level, Congress had deemed potential improvements to science, mathematics, and vocational education as necessary to the national defense. However, in

²⁹ U.S. Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *The National Defense Education Act of 1958: A Summary and Analysis of the Act*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1958), 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹ Christopher Collier, *Connecticut’s Secondary Schools: A History, 1650-2000* (Orange, CT: Clearwater Press, 2009), 492.

³² *Ibid.*, 493.

avoiding the establishment of measurable national benchmarks or centralized planning in public education, the federal government largely passed the debate over the scope and substance of education reform to states and municipalities around the nation. The NDEA was intended as a funding mechanism to local schools undergoing unique reform efforts at the state and local levels. For teachers in Connecticut, the NDEA represented the first step in a possible consolidation of control over local schools to the federal level. As such, the Act was met with some resistance at local levels.

Under Title II of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), Congress appropriated \$83,211 for Connecticut.³³ Under Title III of the NDEA Congress provided for \$134,137 for Connecticut.³⁴ In accordance with certain provisions of the Act, the State Board was expected to develop a plan to comply with the close partnership of local education leaders. The Connecticut Board of Education took the opportunity presented by the NDEA to exercise additional measures of control over local school districts. An example was the purchase of science laboratory equipment. The state plan for the strengthening of instruction in Science, Mathematics, and Modern Foreign Languages under Sections 301-304 of Title III of the NDEA was revised to lay out the policy local public schools needed to follow in order to obtain lab equipment. The January 5th, 1959 State Board Meeting Minutes described a revision to the original plan which demonstrates the new oversight the state government was granted:

The program for the acquisition of equipment will operate through the purchase of equipment by the local board of education in each town. In order to participate in the program described in the State Plan, the local board must make a project application on

³³ Connecticut State Board of Education, *Board Meeting Minutes (October 3, 1959)*, Bound volume from the Connecticut State Archive, 589.

³⁴ Ibid.

the proper forms and must receive approval of this plan prior to the acquisition of any equipment.³⁵

When the funds under the National Defense Education Act were to be dispensed, local public school administrators needed to comply with the bureaucracy of the state. However, in the view of the Department of Education and School Board of Connecticut, the administration of the state was vastly superior to the supervision of the federal government.

Distinctive Features of Connecticut

In the post-*Sputnik* environment of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the state of Connecticut possessed an array of unique features in its economy, demography, and educational tradition. These unique factors at play in Connecticut allow for an analysis of the educational crisis set off by the *Sputnik* launch. The state's affluent, educated citizenry and strong manufacturing base positioned it closely to the needs of a nation conducting a technological and intellectual battle with the Soviet Union. The tradition of decentralization in Connecticut's public schools was not unique. However, Connecticut acted swiftly to protect state and local control of public education, and the debates over control of schooling in the state is well-documented. Finally, in the Norwich Free Academy in Norwich, CT, the state had a uniquely funded public school with one of the most important voices for local public education in the post-*Sputnik* period in William Shattuck serving as its principal. Connecticut found itself in a uniquely crucial position for the nation if the period of reassessment of public education in the United States after the Soviets satellite launch in late 1957. For this reason, the state's reaction to the educational

³⁵ Connecticut State Board of Education, *Board Meeting Minutes (January 5, 1959)*, Bound volume from the Connecticut State Archive, 6.

crisis itself, as well as the resultant federal legislation in the form of the National Defense Education Act, provides for a rich analysis of the pedagogic reaction to *Sputnik*.

The state of Connecticut ranked first in both per capita income and per family effective buying income in 1958.³⁶ Public schools in Connecticut thus had a strong tax base from which to draw, and private schools in the state were frequently well-endowed. Additionally, the 1950 census demonstrated that the state of Connecticut had the highest percentage of its total labor force in skilled crafts, at 16 percent.³⁷ The strong industrial and technological base of the state aligned its economy with the needs of the Cold War Space Race. Also, the demand for skilled labor in manufacturing in Connecticut created strong vocational programs which only expanded following the launch of *Sputnik*. Finally, in 1958, the state was first in the nation in per capita prime military contracts and sixth in total defense production.³⁸

Connecticut's manufacturing economic base relied on heavy manufacturing and skilled labor. The harvest of this industrial base was primarily reaped by the United States military and NASA. In fact, John Dempsey, Governor of Connecticut in the decade from 1961 to 1971, proudly declared in October of 1966 that "every American rocket and satellite that goes aloft bears components manufactured in Connecticut."³⁹ In the educational reassessment which followed the launch of *Sputnik* in October of 1957, the unique economic forces at play in Connecticut naturally informed the reform plans of Connecticut's state government, taxpayers representing local school districts, and secondary school teachers.

Like many states, Connecticut had a tradition of diffuse and decentralized management of the public schools. In the immediate years following the *Sputnik* launch, the passage of the

³⁶ Wilfred J. Sheehan, "It's a Fact," *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 5 (1960): 18.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ John Dempsey, "Speech Before the New England Regional Conference of the National Science Teachers Association," October 1, 1966, Connecticut State Archive, Box A-432.

NDEA as well as rhetoric in Washington signaled to the Connecticut state board of Education that the scope of state and local control might be threatened. For example, in January of 1958, just three months after the Soviet launch, Connecticut State Board of Education member John Alsop explained a new set of policy and curriculum suggestions for public schools around the state. Alsop made sure to clarify that the intention of the Board was not to promote the state Board or state Department of Education “as ‘educational czars’”.⁴⁰ However, the State Board clearly thought that local schools needed guidance in the reassessment of education that was to come. Alsop stated that this reassessment was, in large part, due to the Russians and the *Sputnik* launch.⁴¹ Alsop’s statement “was timed to precede the anticipated statement by the national administration since the Board felt that Federal recommendations should be complementary to an existing state program.”⁴² In 1961, following the passage of the NDEA, the Board expanded on their strong desire to keep curricular decisions out of the hands of the federal government via a recommendation to the Governor:

It is of great importance that the towns of Connecticut, working with the State Board of Education, keep the improvement of the schools in their own hands rather than abdicate their responsibility to the federal government. In fact, it is more practical that the destinies of the schools be determined by the people than any federal bureau.⁴³

The State Board thus clarified that decisions involving Connecticut schoolchildren were to be kept in the hands of local communities in consultation with state authorities. Although many of the aims for improvement set by the state of Connecticut were consistent with the goals of the NDEA, the state Board was vigorous in maintaining control of specific curricular decisions and

⁴⁰ John Alsop, “Alsop Gives Background on Board’s New Policy,” *State Board of Education Newsletter* no. 6, February 1958.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Collier, *Connecticut’s Public Schools*, 513.

implementation of Title III of the NDEA (Financial Assistance for Science, Math, and Foreign Language).

The state also had a large percentage of young children attending private schools. According to the 1960 census, 17.2 percent of Connecticut's elementary school children were enrolled in public schools, which placed the state fifteenth out of fifty.⁴⁴ The private school reaction to the Soviet satellite launch was, of course, largely immune from state mandates, requirements, and science education funding as part of the NDEA. The remaining public schoolchildren came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the 1960 census, 90.7% of persons aged 14 to 17 in Hartford County (population 689,555) were in school, while only 82.9% of people in the same age range went to school in rural Tolland County (population 68,737). Although the state had the highest per capita income in 1958 at \$2,817, six of the eight counties in the state were below this average. A declining textile industry in the Eastern part of the state contributed to this income inequality.⁴⁵ Even within a state with a relatively small population such as Connecticut, there was a wide variety of economic conditions and educational needs within the state that were served by both public and private schools. The most pervasive similarity held by local education decision-makers around the state was the desire for continued local control of education to meet the varying needs of local communities. This desire to retain control, along with the distinctive economic and educational features of Connecticut, informed the pedagogic debate and education policy outcomes at the state level.

⁴⁴ United States Census Bureau, *1960 Census*, University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/start.php?year=V1960>.

⁴⁵ Sheehan, "It's a Fact", 18.

Pedagogic Debate and Reform at the State Level

Because of the importance education was assigned in the Cold War, Connecticut's governors became the principal power-brokers of education policy at the state level. In the post-*Sputnik* period, Connecticut's two governors pursued quite different education reform strategies, but utilized a similar rhetoric and appealed to parallel rationales in campaigning for their individual measures of reform. Governor Abraham Ribicoff held the executive office of Connecticut from 1955 to 1961 and later became the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under John F. Kennedy. Ribicoff generally disdained the trend towards vocational-technical education in the years after the *Sputnik* launch.⁴⁶ Encouraging the liberal arts tradition as valuable no matter the political environment, Governor Ribicoff spoke highly of traditional academic coursework and well-rounded curricula. Secretary Ribicoff, for reasons perhaps born of political expediency, stalwartly facilitated the passage of the 1963 Vocational Education Act. The Vocational Education Act expanded the role of vocational education in the United States and was intended to connect students more directly to the workforce via employment skill programs for secondary school students. Many of these jobs were in technology fields that were becoming increasingly vital to national defense in the eyes of the federal government.

Ribicoff and Dempsey held the title of Governor of Connecticut in very different stages of the post-*Sputnik* education reform era and had very different ideas about which policies to pursue. The former was more interested in shaping the debate regarding the pedagogic future of the Connecticut secondary school whereas the latter discussed education as a means to achieve Cold War victory. However, both men employed a rhetoric characterized by American exceptionalism and focused on the preservation of American democracy in the hopes of instituting their quite different educational reform measures.

⁴⁶ Collier, *Connecticut's Public Schools*, 492.

The public speeches of Governor Abraham Ribicoff provide a compelling look at the strategy for education in Connecticut immediately before and after the launch of *Sputnik* in October of 1957. Before the launch, in a commencement speech given at St. Joseph's College, Ribicoff rejected the appeal of the scientific approach as a method for political policy-making and derided the social engineer who applies scientific thought to the optimization of society.⁴⁷ In a clear appeal to the American individualist ethic, Ribicoff stated that "the social engineer who loves man in the mass does not always love man in units of one."⁴⁸ The governor endorsed a philosophical system based on "absolute, transcendent" morality and derided the trends in culture which pushed men towards social engineering, planning, or technological advancement. It is easy to see how Ribicoff's somewhat general philosophy expressed in his St. Joseph's speech would have influenced the policies he endorsed as the Governor of Connecticut. He expressed these specific ideas on the nature and value of education extensively in a speech given in December of 1957, just two months after the launch of *Sputnik*.

In addressing the Greater Boston Brandeis Club in Boston, Massachusetts, Ribicoff presented his ideas on what he termed "Education in a Free Society". The title of the speech alone provides an insight into the political climate developing following the launching of the Soviet *Sputnik*. In the Brandeis Club speech, the Governor encouraged a calm assessment of the current pedagogic system through a "traditional philosophical, moral, and spiritual"⁴⁹ lens. This approach followed the general moral course laid out by Ribicoff before the launch but specifies that traditional American values should be used to create an educational system in the Cold War. Ribicoff was able to push the technocratic concerns of the present aside while specifically

⁴⁷ Abraham Ribicoff, "St. Joseph's College Commencement Address," June 3, 1957, Connecticut State Archive, Box 695.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Abraham Ribicoff, "Education in a Free Society," (Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, December 1, 1958), Connecticut State Archive, Box 698.

referencing the current source of anxiety for American educators: “Our immediate need to match and surpass Soviet missile proficiency...cannot be met by students who will not be ready for productive scientific work for another ten or twenty years.”⁵⁰ Instead, Ribicoff placed the responsibility for American technological improvements squarely on the shoulders of scientific talent and infrastructure already in place.⁵¹ Although Ribicoff did acknowledge that a long term reform effort was needed in the American public schools, he explicitly dismissed the idea of a radical short-term reform of pedagogic thought in response to the *Sputnik* launch.

The two principal planks of the educational platform laid out by Ribicoff before the representatives of Brandeis were identification and cultivation of young gifted students and the development of a comprehensive system of vocational education. Specifically articulated in the speech is the need for every educator to act as “a scout for society and America.”⁵² Yet again Ribicoff’s clear appeal to American patriotism in the height of the Cold War was evident. Singling out gifted students became a task more important than academic achievement and educational efficiency for their own sake. For many in the education community, the gifted needed separate attention in order to become the leaders of the next stage in the Soviet conflict. However, Governor Ribicoff did not ignore the needs of the remedial student in his speech.

Ribicoff acknowledged that the programs laid out for gifted students would apply to a select few of the most proficient students. The Governor also described a plan intended to improve the educational experience for less able or willing students in Connecticut’s secondary schools. In Ribicoff’s view, just as the identification of the able students is a service to one’s country, programs for the average student could not be ignored if American culture is to persevere: “It would be wholly alien to this country’s tradition to subsidize an intellectual elite at

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

the expense of society as a whole.”⁵³ Ribicoff believed that every student should be challenged in a way commiserate with their respective abilities because every child is equal in worth to the nation. Additionally, a sound education was, for Ribicoff, the key to “a healthy and informed citizenry.”⁵⁴ The two prongs of Ribicoff’s pedagogic plan were the identification of the gifted at a young age and the continuous challenge of all other students. Both aspects of the plan fulfilled practical needs of the Cold War era, namely providing the leaders for the Cold War and creating an informed voting public. Additionally, both parts of the plan appealed to traditional American thoughts of equality and service to the country. It is clear that the Brandeis speech built upon the St. Joseph’s speech delivered by Ribicoff months earlier by molding the general philosophy advocated by the Governor into specific ideas on the appropriate response to the *Sputnik* crisis in education.

Although Ribicoff frequently mentioned the importance of improvements of science education, these needs were not subjugated to the American liberal arts tradition. The Governor again used Cold War rhetoric to promote his ideas, referencing the “danger that concentration on scientific progress alone would mean imitation [of the Soviet educational model] that could lead to eventual surrender to the Russian way of life.”⁵⁵ Ribicoff was simultaneously validating the previous comprehensive pedagogic strategies undertaken in the United States and appealing to fear of a Soviet-style economy which pervaded the Cold War period. In his speech to the graduates of Brown University in 1958, Ribicoff championed the humanities and the necessity of keeping a comprehensive educational model in place. Ribicoff keenly connected to his audience,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Abraham Ribicoff, “Address to Brown University’s Phi Beta Kappa,” (Providence, Rhode Island, March 13, 1958), Connecticut State Archive, Box 698.

asking “who would suggest that Brown should sacrifice to the Russian way the educational genius of...Horace Mann...John Hay...John D. Rockefeller, Jr...or Sam Walter Foss?”⁵⁶

Ribicoff concerned himself in the Brown address with the political importance attached to the current ideas of the American people regarding education for its own sake. The Governor stood up for what he called the “egghead” and encouraged the intellectual elite, of which the Brown students are a part, to act and become “the influential molders of opinion in the nation.”⁵⁷ Ribicoff called on the intelligentsia to become increasingly political-minded in order to shape the future of education to one that is well-rounded and rooted in liberal arts tradition. The Russian example was offered up as an opposing ideal. Ribicoff presented his audience with a clear choice: Succumb to political and military pressures of an immediate nature, or come down from the ivory tower to fight for education for its own sake. This black and white choice was unequivocally rooted in the Cold War conflict and was necessitated by the *Sputnik* launch. Without *Sputnik*, this choice would not have been necessary. *Sputnik* called into question the methods of academic practitioners from university presidents to kindergarten teachers. Ribicoff believed that involvement in the political process was a crucial part of the fight against calls for immediate, wholesale change to American pedagogic strategy.

The formal primary curricular reform effort to materialize during Ribicoff’s term was the September, 1958 Curriculum Bulletin Series. Ralph Kierstad, a Connecticut state consultant in science education, composed the science curriculum bulletin for the state. The publications, composed for all academic subjects, gave reasons for the study of each particular discipline, gave objectives for science programs around the state, and made particular curricular recommendations for particular grade levels, subjects within science, and student ability levels.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The Bulletin Series, necessitated by the *Sputnik* launch, represented a re-examination of the secondary school curricula in Connecticut.

John Dempsey, Governor of Connecticut from January of 1961 to January of 1971, more fully embraced the trend toward hard science education and encouraged education as a means to a technological end. Dempsey was operating in an era when the debates regarding the future of American pedagogy in the public schools were largely resolved. The structure put in place by the NDEA was being administered and, as the Space Race heated up, Americans were able to point to American technological successes as results of the changes to education put into place by the NDEA. Dempsey was not asked to lead the state through the tumultuous time in public education that Ribicoff presided over in the late 1950s. Dempsey was less outspoken in support of a traditional liberal arts curriculum and, through his actions and words as governor, seemed less interested than Ribicoff in the aesthetics of education for its own sake and more interested in the results of an educational system geared toward producing scientists and engineers. However, both governors used similar rhetoric and rationale for their ideas for education in Connecticut. Both proclaimed that educational progress was necessary for the preservation of American democracy, that the changes were necessary to defeat the Soviets, and that the changes were radically different from the Russian method. Thus, irrespective of the actual change advocated by each governor, the language they used to recommend said changes needed to be draped in Cold War jargon to be accepted.

Governor John Dempsey concerned himself principally with the outcomes of education reform in enabling the United States to outstrip the Soviet Union in technological change. In a 1966 speech to the National Science Teachers Association, Dempsey used the unique economic characteristics of Connecticut to provide guidance to the science educators present. Dempsey

reminded the audience that “our [Connecticut’s] economy depends much more on making things than on growing things” and that Connecticut is “closely wedded to the space age.”⁵⁸ Dempsey went on to tie the economic structure of the state to the education of its citizens: “In this state there are...research laboratories employing some twenty-seven thousand persons...there are no doubt young people in your classrooms today who have the capacity to take part...in the exciting scientific efforts that are changing our world.”⁵⁹ Although the speech was given in front of high school teachers, most of the substance of the discussion hinged on the professional development of top scientists and engineers. This stands in stark contrast to Ribicoff, who praised intellectuals and their roles in society, whether they were in fields of science or not.

In July of 1963, Governor Dempsey attended the National Governor’s Conference in Miami, Florida. The Conference included a group of governors who served on what was termed the Cold War Education Committee. The report published by this committee clearly demonstrates the nationalist dialect necessary to affect change in the highly decentralized American public education system. Cold War education is defined by the committee as “the development of knowledge essential to the understanding of America’s heritage and freedom, and of the nature of the attacks upon that freedom, open and covert, by the followers of International Communism.”⁶⁰ Although the members of the committee intended for Cold War education to impact all levels of society, children in America’s secondary schools were a primary intended audience of the message put forth by the group of governors. The committee insisted that “it is vitally important that the nation’s future leaders understand the nature of the Cold

⁵⁸ John Dempsey, “Speech before the National Science Teachers Association.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ U.S. State Governors, *Report of the Cold War Education Committee*, National Governor’s Conference July 24, 1963, from the Connecticut State Archives, Box A-403.

War.”⁶¹ The Cold War Education group recommended leveraging existing university centers for Cold War studies in preparing materials for instructors in each state’s high schools and cautioned “Cold War Education...is best left in the hands of experienced and dedicated educators.”⁶²

Clearly, the committee hoped to encourage the governors assembled at the conference to insist upon specialized and specific Cold War education discussions and classes in high schools around the country. The governors of Connecticut in the post-*Sputnik* era were able to provide a general framework for reform, but local teachers and policy-makers were able to affect change quickly and in substantive ways due to decentralization of public school control.

Pedagogic Debate at the Local Level

The principal outlet for local Connecticut opinion on issues in education in the post-*Sputnik* era was *Connecticut Teacher*. This Connecticut Education Association (CEA) product was published monthly from October to May by the CEA in Hartford. *Connecticut Teacher* contained mainly articles written by professional educators from around the state, as well as university professors of education from around the country. These teachers were writing for their colleagues regarding the latest trends in education, as well as tools of the trade. Careful examination of this trade publication for Connecticut teachers reveals thoughts on pedagogic trends, levels of implementation of federal and state recommendations and mandates, and the impact of *Sputnik* and the subsequent crisis in education on teachers at the local level.

It is clear from the pages of *Connecticut Teacher* that professional educators in the state expressed a desire to retain control over local curricular and administrative issues in the public school system. In the November, 1957 issue of the publication, the Director of the Connecticut

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Study of the Role of Public Education, Dr. Harold R. W. Benjamin, clearly declared the necessity of retaining the status quo in the power structure of education in the state:

They [the people of Connecticut] do not subscribe to the Cinderella concept of educational reform. They do not expect a godmother of government, taxation, supervision, or curriculum to wave a magic wand and eliminate the necessity of the people figuring out for themselves what they want their schools to do.⁶³

Benjamin praised the history of local democratic decision-making in Connecticut and New England in general. The recommendations of Benjamin clearly established local taxpayers as the ideal decision-makers in education reform. This strategy was directly opposed to the way most Americans viewed the Soviet education system. The recommendations of Benjamin not only expressed an opinion on the debate in education, but subsequently and implicitly discredited the Soviet government and social model. For Benjamin, the prominent use of Cold War vernacular revealed the strength it provided to his advocacy of local control in education.

Teachers in Connecticut were quick to recognize and react to the increased focus on science and technology generated by the *Sputnik* launch. Lester S. Silverstein of Bridgeport, Connecticut reported on activities during the summer of 1959 at the Pre-College Science Center program at the University of Bridgeport. Financing for the program was handled by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF became important to the advancement of science and mathematics education on a national level as a funding source and in an advisory capacity.⁶⁴ High school boys entering their senior years were able to participate in the program, which was overseen by high school teachers, administrators, and college professors. Silverstein was happy to report that, for the boys at the program, “comic books were non-existent; newspapers and

⁶³ Harold R.W. Benjamin, “How Good Should Our Schools Be?”, *Connecticut Teacher* 25, no. 2 (1957): 10.

⁶⁴ Rudolph, *Scientists in the Classroom*.

pocket books, notably science oriented ones...and science fiction were popular.”⁶⁵ Following the program, it was clear to Silverstein that “vocationally, their [the participants’] horizons were extended to encompass the new era in science opportunities.”⁶⁶ Special programs such as the one described at the University of Bridgeport were a result of professional educators from around the state partnering on a local level to respond to the increasingly vital need for students with technical skills to apply in the Cold War period.

Additionally, many teachers began to implement science and technology into their pedagogic method. Laurence Boone Perry of Manchester, CT won an honorable mention in the Science Teacher Achievement Recognition Program of the National Science Teachers Association for his use of a tape-recorder in his classroom. Perry described his ability to standardize lessons across all of his classes and attend to other duties of his while the tape recorder was performing the lecture. According to Perry, the pedagogic success of his method was due at least in part due to the fact that “this generation [that of his students] is schooled in the technique of listening to electronic devices, i.e., radio, TV, records, etc.”⁶⁷ Educational television and other multimedia were explored heavily at both the state and federal level with the aspiration that it would increase student interest in the material being presented. In December of 1959, the Connecticut Educational Television Corporation was formed with the help of a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education.⁶⁸ Although technology was applied to the pedagogic method in the aftermath of *Sputnik*, educators such as Perry still employed Dewey’s child-centered pedagogic thought in reforming education for the Space Age.

⁶⁵ Lester S. Silverstein, “Pre-College Science Center,” *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 4 (1960): 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Laurence Boone Perry, “More Efficient Chemistry Instruction,” *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 7 (1960): 5.

⁶⁸ State of Connecticut, *Connecticut Digest of Administrative Reports*, from the Connecticut State Archive, 278.

In light of the increasing funding level and interest in science education being shown at the national level, many professional educators in Connecticut began preparing for a swelling of attempts to control local curricular decisions from the federal level. It became the aim of the Connecticut Department of Education and many of the teachers it supported to be as conciliatory as possible with national decision-makers. State officials were preparing for what they saw as an inevitable conceding of control over curricular and funding decisions in the Cold War environment after the *Sputnik* launch. One such state leader was Connecticut Education Commissioner William J. Sanders, who served his state from 1956 to 1973.⁶⁹ In the pages of *Connecticut Teacher*, Sanders provided the teachers of Connecticut with his vision of education in an America that was increasingly motivated to pursue standardized curricula, federal oversight, and specific vocational needs to support national defense. As Sanders stated, “the school, we may come to understand, does not exist to serve the pleasure of children or the convenience of parents, but the needs of the state and nation.”⁷⁰ The Commissioner, furthermore, opined that arguments against centralization of control over local education were no longer valid. In Sanders’s view, education was a state responsibility and the decisions of local districts should be subject to the oversight and influence of the state government in Hartford.

Although Sanders certainly lobbied for increased regional and state control over local districts to comply with the needs post-*Sputnik* America, the centralization stopped at the state level. The commissioner specifically rejected the idea of education mandates given from Washington.⁷¹ However, Sanders attempted to persuade the readers of *Connecticut Teacher* that the Connecticut Department of Education was in a superb position to consolidate the

⁶⁹ New York Times, “William J. Sanders Obituary”, November 9, 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/09/obituaries/william-j-sanders-educator-87-dies.html>

⁷⁰ William J. Sanders, “6 Dramatic Changes,” *Connecticut Teacher* 27, no. 4 (1960): 6.

⁷¹ Ibid.

“recommendations from foundation-supported studies, from universities, from advanced public school systems and other organizations” into an “acceptable and communicable form.”⁷² Sanders hoped to use the state Education Department as a sort of nervous system for large regional school districts in order to establish consistent educational standards around the state which were in accordance with the latest information and research from around the nation. With an acute understanding of the reform-minded environment of the time, Sanders chose state control over that of the federal government: “To the extent that local and state systems refuse to accept their responsibility, it may be expected that the Federal Congress will take it up.”⁷³

In addition to the pedagogic and scope of control issues which were colored by a Cold War dialect, many teachers in the state directly addressed the issue of maintaining and improving patriotism in young people. This cause was widely considered to be a critical mission of the American public school. Robert S. Kolovson, a teacher in Shelton, Connecticut, believed that the character and value system of American youth in his classroom had been on the decline since the end of the Second World War.⁷⁴ In order to remedy the situation, Kolovson recommended a renewed emphasis on American history in the Social Studies curriculum and appealed to his fellow teachers: “As educators, we are in a strong position to contribute to the re-kindling of the moral spark in America.”⁷⁵ For Kolovson, patriotic rhetoric as a requisite to engage in the debate over the scope of federal control and the extent of curricular reform to one with a science and math focus was only a part of the solution to the crisis in education. In Kolovson’s view, the American public school had a role to play in the cultural and social battle of the era via the social studies curriculum in Connecticut. This idea was echoed on a national level by the

⁷² Ibid., 20.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Robert S. Kolovson, “Is Patriotism on the Decline?”, *Connecticut Teacher* 29, no. 7 (1962): 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

aforementioned Cold War Education Committee assembled at the National Governor's Conference. Many local educators used the *Connecticut Teacher* to express their opinions in the post-*Sputnik* pedagogic debate. Such opinions were focused on retaining local control of education and ensuring the retention of American exceptionalism in the public consciousness via public education.

The Norwich Free Academy- A Case Study

The unique pressures applied by the *Sputnik* launch challenged local school districts to reform their educational standards. One such dynamic local school administration in the post-*Sputnik* period was that of the Norwich Free Academy. The Academy was founded in 1854 and still operates today as an endowed school. The NFA is considered an independent school, governed by the NFA Board of Trustees as opposed to the City of Norwich. However, the state of Connecticut retains oversight over the general curricular structure of the school. Principal George Shattuck served as the head of the Norwich Free Academy from 1940-65, and the strategy pursued during his tenure demonstrated both the challenges to traditional educational theory and responses to the crisis in American education following the launch of *Sputnik*. In addition to the leadership of Shattuck, the unique organizational structure of the school allows for an exemplary demonstration of the problems of policy hierarchy brought on by reform efforts in Connecticut.

In the era immediately before the *Sputnik* launch, Shattuck's educational strategy was heavily influenced by the Life-Adjustment movement. The 1956 "Statement of Guiding Principles Prepared by Staff" noted that the aims of the Academy are based on Robert

Havighurst's developmental tasks theory.⁷⁶ Of the seven developmental tasks of youth listed, only one ("fundamental processes") had an academic focus. Other tasks included "worthy home membership" and "worthy use of leisure time".⁷⁷ Apart from the stated mission of the school, individual departments within the Norwich Free Academy also clearly demonstrated the life-adjustment curriculum typical of the pre-*Sputnik* American classroom. For example, the "Home and Family Life Group" at NFA offered guest lectures in the 1955-56 school year. Among the presentations given were "Christmas is Family Time" and "Adjustments for Teenagers",⁷⁸ discussions which were motivated by the life-adjustment movement and almost certainly lacked a purely academic focus.

With the launch of the Soviet satellite in October of 1957, both Principal Shattuck and the NFA Board of Trustees quickly reacted to the demand for reform in American public education. At the December 1957 Meeting of the Trustees of the Norwich Free Academy, Shattuck and the Trustees discussed "several general and timely topics" in American education at the time.⁷⁹ Although little detail was given in the meeting minutes, there is little doubt that the pedagogic implications of the *Sputnik* launch were a point of discussion for NFA leadership. In the months after the launch, tangible changes to Academy priorities were instituted by the board. A \$13,000 modernization project for the physics laboratory was undertaken⁸⁰ and Shattuck suggested that two Mathematics teachers be sent to summer school at NFA expense.⁸¹ These changes to the funding structure of the school illustrate the strong motivation for science and mathematics reform at the Norwich Free Academy after the *Sputnik* launch.

⁷⁶ "Norwich Free Academy 1955-56 Annual Report" (Bound volume, Norwich, CT, 1956), 66.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁹ "Norwich Free Academy Board Meeting Notes" (Bound volume, Norwich, CT, 1960), 181.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 183.

⁸¹ Ibid., 163.

Because NFA was privately endowed, these changes to pedagogic strategy were not the result of a mandate or funding incentive from the State of Connecticut or the Federal government. The decisions made and verbiage used by Shattuck and the Board in the immediate aftermath of *Sputnik* reveals the motivation of local education leaders. These motivations were unencumbered by political pressures or the evolution of popular opinion of American education in the period before the passage of the NDEA. Shattuck and the other leaders frequently noted the pedagogic agility of the Academy in the late 1950s. In discussing NFA programs for the gifted and slow learners, Shattuck specifically referenced the influence of Russian technology on national education policy: “Both programs [for the gifted and slow learners] were established long before *Sputnik* and the flurry of national interest in education that went in orbit last winter”.⁸² Shattuck attempted to further differentiate the educational trends within NFA from those around the nation by assuring those in the community that the leaders of the school would not pursue popular pedagogic reforms to simply “attain avant-garde status”.⁸³

In addition to changing the academic strategy of the Academy, the *Sputnik* launch altered Shattuck’s rationale for instituting the pedagogic change. In his annual report, Shattuck’s language became colored by nationalist attitudes of the Cold War period. Shattuck spoke of “fulfilling our [professional educators] mission for the youth we serve and for America”.⁸⁴ For the education decision-makers of the Norwich Free Academy and many schools around the nation, the pedagogic path of the American school became about more than academic rigor for its own sake. Rather, the preservation of American democracy became a fundamental aim of the school. The *Sputnik* launch was not the first national crisis that Shattuck was tasked to navigate NFA through. In 1950, as the Korean War wore on, Shattuck stated that “the paramount job of

⁸² “Norwich Free Academy 1957-58 Annual Report” (Bound volume, Norwich, CT, 1958), 83.

⁸³ “Norwich Free Academy 1958-59 Annual Report” (Bound volume, Norwich, CT, 1959), 77.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

our school in times of national stress and international uncertainty is to offer experiences and learning activities in fundamental aims of secondary education”.⁸⁵ Shattuck suggested that these “learning activities” should revolve around such topics as citizenship, international understanding, and character.⁸⁶

The aim of NFA during these years of crisis evolved from purely academic to society-enriching. In what was perhaps the most strenuous period of national hardship Shattuck endured (the Second World War), he proclaimed unequivocally that “Education stands for unwavering patriotism...democracy and freedom at all times”⁸⁷ and “new secondary education will be more practical, less academic, and more concerned with the needs of students and the requirements of society”.⁸⁸ Thus, in addition to the pedagogic change brought on by *Sputnik* at NFA, namely an increased focus on the quality of math, science, and gifted student education, the rhetoric employed by Shattuck to justify the changes reverted to the pragmatist, patriotic tone used in times of war earlier in the century. For the administrators of the Norwich Free Academy, the crisis in education propagated by the Soviet *Sputnik* launch was best met with increased focus on academic subjects most relevant to the national defense. Shattuck’s plain language on the mission of the school reveals that the pedagogic changes seen at NFA were in no small part undertaken due to the political and technological pressures of the Cold War. The needs of the nation were clearly a more compelling reason for pedagogic change in Norwich than an increase in academic rigor entirely for its own sake.

⁸⁵ Dorothy P. Agranovitch. *The Shattuck Years* (Norwich, CT: Norton-Peck Library, Norwich Free Academy), 47-48.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, a crisis in the American pedagogic system was debated with a Cold War-appropriate, pro-American rhetoric in the state of Connecticut. This discussion over the future of the American secondary school was a direct result of the Soviet launch of the *Sputnik* space satellite on October 4th, 1957. The two principal decisions to be made in the post-*Sputnik* period were the scope of federal government involvement and the level to which a purely academic, “hard pedagogy” would be pursued in order to exceed the accomplishments of the Russians. Both the debate and the outcomes thereof were heavily influenced by comparisons with the Soviet education system. Regardless of which side of either debate a potential reformer came down on, the reform was nearly always described as a departure from the types of pedagogic reform the Russians were pursuing or the reform they were likely to pursue in the future. In some ways, this anti-Soviet qualifier was more prevalent than the substance of the reform initiative itself.

The immediate, tangible reaction to *Sputnik* in the American educational community and the massive interest in comparing American schools to their Russian counterparts demonstrates that the satellite launch was the distinct cause of the push for reform in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The dominant pedagogic system in the period prior to 1957 was challenged in both Connecticut and around the nation and the scope of federal funding and control of local public education was expanded with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. Within Connecticut itself, decision-makers on the state and local level expressed a strong desire to maintain curricular decision-making capabilities within Connecticut and its towns. They were largely successful in that effort. Additionally, although science education efforts were expanded and vocational education in Connecticut was

strengthened in accordance with the increasing importance of the national defense, the general curricular structure of the state before *Sputnik* was maintained. State leaders strived to keep a liberal arts curriculum to complement the new emphasis on the sciences and mathematics. In fact, modest curricular reform was undertaken at the state level to preempt an assumed centralization of control to be pursued at the national level.

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